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AC 31/1/89

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DISPOSAL OF DECOMMISSIONED NUCLEAR SUBMARINES

The Secretary of State was grateful for Minister(DP)'s minute of 11th January, covering a draft memorandum for 'H' Committee on the way ahead on the disposal of decommissioned nuclear submarines, which he discussed with your Minister on 31st January; US of S(DP), CDS, PUS, CSA, AUS(FS) and Head of Sec(FS) were present. The meeting also had before them the minutes of 10th and 23rd January from CFS and CSA respectively.

2. The Secretary of State noted that sea disposal remained the preferred method of disposal but said that he accepted that, for the reasons set out in Minister(DP)'s minute and the draft paper, sea disposal of HMS Dreadnought in 1989 was not feasible; no further work should be done on that particular option for the time being. Moreover, whilst sea disposal remained a possible option for the future, the most careful handling would be required given the international and American sensitivities. The Secretary of State also accepted that, as the difficulties of storing de-commissioned submarines would grow markedly from 1992, the feasibility of other options had to be pursued; the potential problems could not simply be ignored.

3. On the way ahead, CSA suggested that one option which might merit investigation was that of putting Dreadnought 200 metres down on the continental shelf, within UK territorial waters, and with its reactor encased in concrete. At that depth, it would be beyond the level of diving for recreational purposes; permanent sensors could be installed to monitor radiation levels; and the submarine could be recovered should NIREX produce a long term solution for storage, in due course. Any attempt by the Soviets to tamper with the submarine would be readily apparent. In discussion, two other possible options were identified:

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